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The majority of elementary counselors are former elementary teachers, probably with little specific preparation for the elementary counseling role. While some progress is being made to prepare competent counselors, much remains to be done. Competencies needed by elementary counselors include skills in the following areas: (1) counseling with children, individually and in groups; (2) consulting activities with adults; (3) working with all children, "normal" and exceptional; and (4) possessing depth understanding in child growth and development. Since the elementary counseling role contrasts sharply with the secondary role, and relevance for elementary school counseling cannot be subsumed within traditional offerings in counselor education, a differentiated preparation must be devised. A model program including listings of competencies required, specific content areas, and laboratory experiences, is presented in a two-year graduate format. A list of references is included. (KJ)

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELOR PREPARATION: A MODEL

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The first people to enter and practice a new line of work usually come from related occupations. New professions are not established by youth who are just starting out. This is done by persons from other fields who see a new need or a new opportunity (Hughes 1958). The pioneers in a field bring to their new professional role some previously acquired skills and understandings which they modify or adapt to fit different occupational demands. As they gain experience in their new role, they develop appropriate understandings and performance capabilities.

As the profession develops, those already in it become concerned about those who are admitted to practice. Professional practitioners in the new line of work and those directly concerned with it come to recognize that it requires some unique skills and knowledge, and they attempt to provide special preparation for the entrants who follow them. Generally, this concern is expressed through standards for preparation set by training institutions, by state agencies, and by professional associations.

The majority of counselors now working in elementary schools are former elementary teachers (Van Hoose and Vafakas, 1968). Presumably, most have some formal preparation for their new professional role; however, since models for counselor preparation at the elementary level are scarce and even non-existent in some localities, it is unlikely that a large number of persons have specific preparation for the elementary school counseling role. Aubrey (1968) has noted that many elementary school counselors received most or all of their preparation and experience at the secondary level.

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Some worthwhile efforts have been made by the American Personnel and Guidance Association to provide guidelines and recommendations for the preparation of counselors for grades K-6. Also, several counselor education institutions have developed specific programs for preparing counselors for elementary schools. In many other cases, however, the preparation program closely resembles models used for the preparation of secondary school counselors (Nitzschke, 1975). Thus, while some progress is being made, it is clear that much remains to be done to achieve the quality preparation necessary to produce competent counselors. Educational institutions, professional associations, and individual members of the profession, must give continuing attention to what constitutes an appropriate preparation program. Moreover, sufficient flexibility must be built into such programs so that counselor education can keep pace with changes in the school and the larger society. This requires some provision for continuous evaluation of the relevance of the program.

In the balance of this article some of the professional competencies needed by elementary school counselors are discussed and a model program of professional studies in elementary school guidance is presented.

Rationale

Counselor Role

1. The elementary school counselor's role is unique. While there is some obvious overlap between the functions of elementary school counselors and other school workers, and some similarity between elementary and secondary school counseling, the work of the professionally competent elementary school counselor can be clearly differentiated from other school personnel. If such distinctions are not visible, then the elementary school counselor has no valid reason for a differentiated existence.

2. The elementary school counselor's primary role is counseling with children, individually and in groups. Support for this assertion is provided by the research of McCreary and Miller (1966) who found that the guidance service valued most by teachers, counselors, and administrators was counseling.

3. Consultation with adults significant in the life of the child is an important function of the elementary school counselor. However, it is a secondary function and derives from the primary function of counseling. Much of what happens to the child in the elementary school depends on the adults with whom children live and work in the school. By his very nature the child is dependent upon adults. Our culture does not permit children to make major decisions nor does it give them the freedom and responsibility of adolescents and adults. The child is in a process of growing, developing, and becoming and the orderliness of this process will depend greatly upon the attitudes and understandings of adults with whom he is in daily contact. The consultative activities of the elementary school counselor should focus upon helping adults understand how their behavior affects children, upon developing better understanding of children, and when necessary, upon changing child-adult interpersonal relationships.

4. The elementary school counselor serves all pupils; the normal, the gifted, the slow and the maladjusted. He therefore should be prepared to provide both direct and indirect services not only to "normal" pupils, but to those who are classified as exceptional. Exceptional students are those who have special needs: the gifted, the disadvantaged, those with physical, behavioral, emotional, and learning disorders.

5. The professional elementary school counselor possesses depth understanding in child growth and development and in the behavioral sciences. He has a thorough knowledge of the learning process, and is an expert in human relations (ACES-ASCA Statement, 1966).

Differentiated Preparation

Justification for a specialized preparation program for the elementary school counselor lies in the premise that his position and role are unique. Two additional propositions follow from this: (1) the elementary school counseling role will contrast sharply with the role of the secondary school counselor, and (2) relevance for elementary school counseling cannot be subsumed within traditional offerings in counselor education. Some elaboration may help to clarify these points.

1. Adequate performance of the functions and responsibilities noted above requires a mimimum of two years of graduate preparation. Further, the provision of a common core of preparation with differentiation in one or two courses is not sufficient. As Eckerson (1967) has stated, "it is important that courses in child development, personality, learning theory, and even the philosophy of guidance have specific implications for working with children."

2. Laboratory and field experiences for elementary school counselors must be given much more emphasis. Both a practicum and an internship should be required. The supervised practicum should provide the prospective counselor with an opportunity to counsel with a large number of children with varying needs and representative of a wide range of behaviors. The internship should be a cooperative arrangement wherein the student counselor works in an elementary school under the joint supervision of a trained and experienced counselor and qualified counselor educator. The internship should provide experiences in

group guidance, group counseling, and guidance organization. One of the main learnings from the internship should be in establishing a climate for guidance in the elementary school, and in developing collaborative relationships with other school personnel.

A MODEL PREPARATION PROGRAM

Competencies Required

In order to perform counseling and other related functions in the elementary school, the counselor should possess a high degree of understanding in the following areas:

1. The psychology of human development, with specific attention to the middle childhood years. Studies in psychology should also include personality, learning theory, and abnormal behavior. Attention should also be given to interpreting and using research findings in child development and other behavioral sciences.

2. Dynamics of social environs; i.e., social psychology, social institutions, and urban sociology. For the elementary school counselor, special attention should be given to the family, the community, and the elementary school.

3. Professional studies in education. This area includes educational philosophy, educational psychology, measurement and evaluation, and research.

4. Professional studies in guidance and counseling should consist of the following:

   A. Guidance philosophy and principles; the guidance needs of children and youth and the relationship of guidance to the total educational program.

   B. Group procedures in guidance and counseling with special consideration given to the group activities that are appropriate at the elementary level.

C. Individual appraisal in guidance including the use of tests and non-test techniques in identifying pupils needing special help and in appraising the developmental status of pupils.

D. Counseling theories and their implications for counseling with children; the counseling process, including such skills as facilitating verbalization with children, and the use of play in counseling.

E. Skill in interpreting information about pupils to teachers, administrators, and other pupil personnel workers.

F. Consulting with teachers, parents, and other school workers.

G. Vocational development theories and their implications for elementary school guidance.

H. Designing and conducting research relating to such matters as pupil needs, and characteristics and effectiveness of guidance.

I. Ethical, legal, and professional aspects of counseling.

The content areas and laboratory experiences regarded as minimum requirements in elementary school counselor preparation are indicated below. At least one graduate level course should be required for each of the sub-topics listed.

A. Psychology

Human Growth and Development
Theories of Personality
Psychological Testing
Learning Theories
Abnormal Psychology

B. Sociology

Social Psychology
Social Institutions
The Family

C. Professional Education

Philosophy of Education
Educational Sociology
Educational Measurement and Evaluation
Special Education
The Elementary School Curriculum
Educational Research

D. Guidance and Counseling

Philosophy and Principles
Guidance in Elementary Schools
Individual Analysis
Counseling Theory and Process
Group Guidance
Group Counseling
The Psychology of Careers
Consultation
Final Seminar

E. Laboratory and Field Experiences

Counseling Practicum
Internship

Summary

Counseling in the elementary school is concerned primarily with understanding, interpreting, and modifying the behavior of pupils. It follows then, that a substantial portion of the professional preparation program should be in the behavioral sciences.

The performance of the elementary school counseling function requires some understandings and skills that are different from those needed by counselors at other levels in education. This means that professional preparation should deviate sharply at several points.

Elementary school counseling is a developing profession and is not tied to traditional practices. We therefore have a golden opportunity to develop quality programs. We need to be courageous enough to design programs appropriate to a unique role and to alter and lengthen current preparation programs. An emerging profession cannot afford the luxury of expediency and compromise.

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